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Easter 7 One Year Series 2017

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Easter VII (Exaudi)

This Sunday has an odd feel about it for the Christian. The seventh Sunday of Easter always falls between the feast of the Ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost, the uncomfortable ten days in which the Apostles waited for the promise of that outpouring to take place. It almost feels as though the church holds its breath.

We are not so good at waiting. We like things right now. We like our service to be fast at a restaurant. We like our Internet to be fast and complain when it is slow. We binge-watch whole seasons of TV shows, one after another. We are not good at waiting.

But God's people have to be patient. As one fellow I heard said, "God always shows up, he often is late by my timing, but He always shows up." Today we remember that waiting time when the disciples gathered, prayed, and waited.

The readings today focus our attention on that anticipated outpouring of the Spirit which of course we already know. But by putting ourselves into the shoes of those disciples in that dreary ten days after the ascension and before Pentecost, we get to see that Spirit's arrival in two very stark terms.

First: The Spirit is the fire of God, the fire which consumes our sin and purifies us. Ezekiel speaks of God doing this for the sake of his name which we have profaned among the nations. We sing the great penitential psalm of David after he was confronted by the prophet for his sins of adultery, lying, and murder. David prays that God would create a new heart and spirit within him, words we may well sing regularly in worship. Peter speaks of being sober-minded and self-controlled. The human being must be purified by God himself, or he/she will not be pure, not pure for heaven. God vindicates his holiness, says Ezekiel, by making us holy.

Second: The Spirit of God is opposed to the spirit of this world and those who are filled with that Holy Spirit and whose lives bear witness to Him, expect persecution. Peter's audience faces a fiery trial. Jesus warns his disciples that they will be cast out of the Synagogues, a terrible fate for any pious Jew for it meant that they were cut off from the people of God. But Jesus assures them that the true people of God know the Father and are known by the Father through the Son.

For the old man, the stinker who clings so tightly to us, this is a grim message. The sin he loves so dearly and the status he craves in this world is all being assaulted by God this week. But for the man whom God has raised up from the waters of Baptism this is sweet indeed. God has reminded us that this is all his doing, both the purification at which I am sometimes such a miserable failure, and the fact that I meet with this opposition. My failings are not the question here, but rather God's doings are what we consider.

Collect of the Day

O King of glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation but send us the Spirit of truth whom You promised from the Father; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

O King of Glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted high in triumph. This is of course Jesus we address here. The Ascension marks the day he assumes his rightful place at the right hand of God, wielding all of heaven's power. There is no higher place. Of course this is all assuming the Ascension. This is why I think it is good to start the service with at least a little recognition of that point and what it means for this day. There is a very important point to be made here in the position of Jesus. He is at the right hand of God, this is not a place, but a statement of his power. There is no power that does not flow through his pierced hands. As the folks for whom he has died, this is exceptionally good news, but it is also sometimes really disconcerting and can lead to some very tough questions. I would simply urge you to remember that this all mediated through his incomparable love for us. Sometimes you have to grit your teeth and say that. "Jesus loves me, I know it, I am baptized" because sometimes it doesn't feel that way. I only say this because you need to be aware that occasionally statements about the power of Jesus lead folks to ask the very difficult "why" questions. Best to mingle this power talk with love, which of course this next line does. Don't fall into the occasional trap of the Reformed and just sing about the power and might of God and neglect the love.

Leave us not without consolation. That is where we are without the Spirit. The Pentecostals insist that he is found in the glossolalia and acts of miraculous power, but we see the miracle in the faith of the little widow who walks out the door after church and can smile and greet us despite all the heart ache that we know has visited her life. She has been consoled by the fact that this Holy Spirit has brought her the faith which trusts in Jesus and the forgiveness and resurrection which he has won on the cross. She rejoices. Even though her house seems quiet and lonely without her husband, she is never really alone, Jesus has promised and she believes that promise. He is with her where ever she goes, even on that day when she goes to the hospital for the last time. And so, her wrinkled face breaks into a smile when she greets the man who preached the good news to her this morning. She has comfort amid her sorrow. They do not define her life, but Jesus does, and she believes his beautiful promises, and she has much joy as a result. This is a far sturdier sign of God's consoling Spirit than unintelligible tongues.

*The consolation we need is found in the Spirit of Truth who brings us the one who is the Way, the **Truth** and the Life. He does this through the gift of Scripture, preaching, Baptism, Supper, the community of faith and all the good things which strengthen our faith and trust in Christ. As you develop the sermon, you will want to focus on at least one of those.*

Readings

Ezekiel 36:22-28

²² "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will

give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.²⁸ You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

This passage is critically important to the NT and seems to have been floating in the background when certain iconic passages were written. I have heard it proposed that when Jesus rode into Jerusalem and the Jewish leaders chastised him for the praises the people sang that Jesus replied that if they did not sing God would cause even the stones to sing. Was he pointing to their chests when said that? Or when he said that they should not count on being the children of Abraham, but that God would raise up children from Abraham from “these stones” does he have his finger laid on the chests of his opponents, insinuating that their hearts are stones that God must replace? Paul also references this in Romans 8 when speaks of the Spirit within us. This is the verse the writer to the Hebrews has in mind when he speaks of us being sprinkled with clean water in 10:22.

Verse 27 is perhaps the most important for us. God puts his Spirit within us and “causes” us to walk. Hebrew has a strange verb construction which grammarians label the Hiphil. It is a causative form of the verb. I can walk, or, if I use the Hiphil form of the verb, I can cause someone to walk. This is theologically significant when one is speaking of God as the subject of the verb. God causes us to walk in his statutes and rules. This is the freedom of which Paul speaks in Galatians where he says now we are free to keep the Law of God. This is simply sanctification. We get sanctification dead wrong when we imagine that we are being challenged to live up to God’s expectations, as if we could. Sanctification is God making us holy, causing us to walk in his commandments and way. By putting his Holy Spirit within us and causing us to walk in a certain way. In this sense the Ten Commandments become sweet Gospel – they speak of what God is working in us.

The imagery of a heart of flesh replacing the heart of stone is vivid and still speaks to us. If you are watched any of the Game of Thrones you know that there is a terrible disease which turns people slowly to stone-like creatures. It is fearsome and loathsome, a sort of leprosy. This image of being inert, lifeless, and stony continues to resonate with people. God is the one who can fix this problem, not me.

The preacher should also notice that the purpose of this is essentially evangelistic. God does this so the nations may see us and know his work and praise his name. God has them in mind when he causes us to walk in his ways. This is not a self-serving or a me-centric proclamation. We promised the activity of God in our lives because God has big plans.

Sermon Idea: Holy! (That the hearer would look with eager expectation to the work of the Holy Spirit in his/her life and embrace that life which the Spirit of God engenders.)

We are in a strange little time for Christianity. Jesus has ascended into heaven and in a week we will celebrate the outpouring of the Spirit in Pentecost. Of course, Pentecost is in our past and is

in our present, has been ever since we were baptized or as Ezekiel says it, “sprinkled with clean water.”

But sometimes familiarity brings with it the temptation to take something for granted. As we remember those uncomfortable ten days after Jesus rose into the sky and before he returned in the Spirit of God, we want to remember and take stock of just what it is that he does.

First of all we want to remember just what makes the Holy Spirit holy. It is a mistake to think that we call the Holy Spirit holy just because that is what God is. Of course God is holy. That is one way to speak of the very nature of God. We don’t need to call him holy. We don’t call Jesus the Holy Son or the Father the Holy Father. What makes the Holy Spirit holy is that he makes me holy. Look at what God intends to do by putting his Spirit within us within this text. He will make us holy, vindicating his name among the nations and cleansing us from all our uncleanness, purging our idolatry. This is no small thing for we have a deeply ingrained idolatry which renders us foul and causes us and the world all sorts of grief. This will be no band-aid solution. God will have to replace our heart of stone with a heart of flesh, a beating, red, living heart that loves and rejoices in God. The preacher may want to keep in mind Jesus stark words about no new wine in old wine skins or new patches on old garments. God is not talking about helping us cope with our sin, he is killing and replacing, renewing. The brutal imagery of baptismal drowning needs its voice here. I cannot change my heart, God must do that. That is what he does in baptism and through the presence of the Spirit. He makes me holy, he gives me a new heart, and he makes me alive again. He causes us to live in his presence and he once more becomes our God, the one who walks in the garden with us.

That means more than a radical reorienting of our lives. The stony heart of sin was hardened because it saw only itself. We would be our own gods, the true idolatry. We seized what belonged to God alone and would have turned all worship inward, toward ourselves. In Baptism God slays the old human and raised up a new person. He turns us outward and opens us both to him and to one another, causing us to walk in his statutes.

This is a very good thing. Our old man will hate it, naturally. He hates everything that God does and rages against it. But he is defeated and baptism has dealt him a mortal wound. When we lie down in death, he will not rise again. But from the waters of Baptism God has raised up a new person, a new man, as Paul calls him. That one walks in these statutes and delights in this holiness which God works inside of us. Do you find that the old man is dominant today? Fear not, God is stronger than he is and has already slain him. God is the one who replaces your stony heart with that beating and living heart. Trust him. He works it even now.

Next Sunday we will gather to remember the feast of Pentecost. What will that Spirit do in your life? Ezekiel has given us something of a plan, an idea, which he spoke to the waiting people of God thousands of years ago as they too awaited God’s action. They looked forward to the return from exile. We look forward to the day of resurrection. But Ezekiel wanted them and us to know that this work of God is not some future only thing. Yes, we await the completion of the good

work which God has begun in us (Philippians 1:6) but we also rejoice in the work begun, the gifts bestowed.

Psalm 51:1-12

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.
- ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
- ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
- ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

I Peter 4:7-11 (12-14)

- ⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of

sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

Luther

1. This text is also an admonition to the Christian life and the fruits from the good tree which is called a Christian, that is, the one who through his faith has redemption from sin and death and has been placed into the kingdom of grace and eternal life. From no one he should live that way, so that people can perceive that he has laid hold of this treasure and has now become a new man.

2. He wrote this Epistle in large part for those in Greece, among whom were the common crowd and carousers who were only accustomed to reveling and being full. People have also accused us Germans of this, and not without reason.

3. In order to bring these Christians away from these vices to sobriety and moderation, he reminds them of the office and work which especially belongs to Christians as their one, true worship, for which reason they are Christians separated from all the rest of the world...Namely, first, that they become different people and are busy with God's Word, through which they have and retain their new birth. Second, after they have been born anew, they have an enemy, that is, the devil and their own flesh (corrupted by the devil and stuffed full of evil desires), with which they must fight as long as they live on earth. Because they have been placed into this office and conflict, they must not be lazy and drowsy, much less raving drunk pigs, who notice nothing and do not think of what they have to do. Rather, they are to be alert and sober and always prepared with God's Word and their prayers.

20. We still see how the Christian in the early church (when they suffered great persecution) were very diligent in this point and were almost more than willing daily, not only morning and evening but also at other fixed hours, to come together and pray with one another, even often watched the whole night and spent it in prayer. Some people practiced this to such an extent that sometimes they did not eat for four days, as St. Augustine says.

That is stretching it somewhat too tightly, especially when people later made an example and commandment out of it. But it is nevertheless praiseworthy that they were very sober evening and morning and always...

Left over from this, we still have the schools for children where evening and morning prayer is retained. But it should happen in the house of every Christian, for every father of a family is obliged to insist that his children, at least in the morning and evening, pray and commit to God all danger in the world, asking Him to turn away His wrath and not to punish us as we deserve.

21. In this way we have been correctly taught, and yet this is not a great burden, and we have not been forbidden from eating, drinking, and dressing as is necessary, also for honor and joy, as long as we do not become filthy beasts and pigs and so shamefully bury our reason. This is a sin a shame to man, even if there were no God or prohibition, and it is much less tolerated by Christians. Even among the heathen and Turks there is more virtue in this matter. We must be ashamed before them, though it would be proper for us to set the example so that they would have to be ashamed before us. We should most highly guard ourselves so that no one can take offense at our life, so that God's name is not slandered but praised, as St. Peter also admonishes at the end of this Epistle reading.

29 (speaking to vs. 8) That is why St. Peter praises this love and says that it is such a virtue, and so strong and powerful, that it not only can tolerate but also "cover a multitude of sins". He cites this passage from Solomon's Proverbs, chapter 10[:12], which the Papists also turn upside down and explain against the doctrine of faith. They make love for your neighbor into a work or virtue toward God and want to draw the conclusion that through our love our sins are covered, that is, forgiven and blotted out. We will let those fools go their way, for it is quite clear from the text that he is talking about hatred and love among people and does not mean our own sins but other people's sins and transgressions. To cover our sins before God, a different love is necessary, namely, the love of the Son of God who alone is the Sin-bearer before God, and who (as John the Baptist says carries on His neck and shoulders our sins and the all the world's sins and takes them away. Through this love He has also given us an example that we also (through love) bear and gladly forgive other people's sins committed against us.

(Luther's Works, Vol 77. CPH, 2014. Pp. 291-310.)

Luther's notes only address the first paragraph of our text as his reading stopped at verse 11. He reads this as a text exhorting us to lives which reflect God's holiness. He has rather lengthy excurses into the bad behavior of Germans in his day which are quite entertaining.

I think, however, that our editors have done us a great favor by including this next paragraph, for Peter connects this exhortation most surely to Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. The suffering audience of Peter's letter are suffering with Christ. Their holiness is not some effort on their part but an effect of this union which God has wrought in their lives.

I am also struck by the fact that Peter exhorts them not to consider this a strange thing. Christ suffered. He told us we would take up a cross and follow him. Why are we surprised by suffering? It is the theology of Glory which imagines that because we are on God's side that things should go swimmingly with us. The theologian of the cross sees in the suffering, setback,

and struggle not the judgments of God against us but the opportunity for Christ's kingdom to come and his will to be done.

Sermon Idea: At one with the Lord Jesus (That the Holy Spirit would show forth the hearer's unity with Christ.)

Peter gives a rather strange picture of the Christian life today. Perhaps most shocking to our hearers will be the admonition that we should not be surprised when suffering, fiery trials, come our way. After all, we are united with Christ and he suffered. That this surprises many North American Christians is itself shocking. Jesus has been explicit (see today's Gospel lesson) and clear. The servant is not above the master. We have been called to take up a cross and follow. But still we are surprised that sometimes we suffer for Christ's sake.

The second unity with Christ, which Peter treats first is that we start to look like him in all sorts of ways. Peter describes a life lived which no longer revolves around me but around God. This sounds more familiar and like a safer territory for preaching, but the preacher needs to be careful here. The human predilection to turn this sort of talk into the thing which distinguishes me from the hell-bound crowd is powerful. It is not to my glory, as Peter notes, that I do all these things, but for the glory of God. As Ezekiel says, it is for God's name's sake that he causes us to walk in his statutes. Not ours.

So we must connect these two paragraphs. The hospitality I show, the preaching, teaching, and service we render, the love we show, it is because we have been given to look like this Jesus, to be one with him.

At the end, Peter gives the blessing. At the revealing of Christ we rejoice, for then we are shown to have been like him.

John 15:26-16:4

²⁶ "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ² They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴ But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and

righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

¹² “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Luther

21. So in this text we are presented with a picture of what happens to the kingdom of Christ in the opposing kingdom of the world. This was prophesied in the first promise of the Gospel, when the Church had its first beginning, when God said to the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He will trample your head, but you will bite His heel” [Gen. 3:15]. This “enmity” must always continue in the world; it remains a perpetual “enmity” and a perpetual fight. When Christ comes with His preaching and meets the serpent, he quickly begins to rage against Him and to bite and sting with his poisonous tongue and teeth, for he is afraid for his head. But he has not yet won anything and still lies under the feet of this Seed of the woman, who tramples on his head and continues so long that he poison and wrath are used up on Him, and his power comes to nothing so that he can no longer do any harm.

22. The comfort and victory we have in Christ is that He will nevertheless preserve His Church against the devil’s wrath and power. But in the meantime we suffer from the bites and murderous stings of the devil, which hurt our flesh and blood. The worst is that we must see and suffer these things from those who want to be and are even called “God’s children” and “the Christian Church.” We must learn to become accustomed to such things, for Christ Himself and all the saints have not had any better.

24. That is the first part of this sermon and prophecy of Christ. The second part gives the reason why it happens that such excellent people – who are the best, wisest, and most holy among God’s people, who earnestly want to love and promote God’s glory and worship – so bitterly and horribly persecute Christ and His Christians.

“They will do these things to you because they know neither My Father nor Me.”

25. This is why it happens. He Himself confesses what moves them to such hatred and persecution of Christians. “It is,” He says, “because you preach about Me, whom they do not know.” They are in the regular office in which they should teach and preach as high priests, scribes, and now as pope and bishops, etc., and should see that no other preaching arises

against the old, authorized doctrine of Moses and the Law, which was seriously and earnestly committed to them by Moses,...

These words are heard, along with the extension I provide above, in Year B on Pentecost Day. I have included the notes from my last treatment of them.

This is a text pregnant with theology about the Holy Spirit. Here are a handful of themes we might address, but there are surely more:

- 1. The Spirit is called the Helper whom Jesus sends. How does he “Help”? The Greek word used here, “Paraclete” is worthy of your study. Literally it means “called beside” and suggests a meaning of one who is with us. How does that presence help us? I think that likely has legs to preach!*
- 2. The Spirit is all about witnessing. That is what he does and presumably what he comes to help us do. He bears witness himself, and he enables our witness. A great evangelism sermon.*
- 3. The presence of the Spirit is actually better than talking to Jesus as the disciples did that day. It is to our advantage that Jesus goes so that the Spirit may come. If he doesn’t go, the helper doesn’t come and we need that helper more than we need the unascended presence of Christ. Sounds strange – but it is true. The Spirit’s presence makes Jesus even more present in a way. But in order for that to happen Jesus has to step aside and into the world in a different way. The Spirit by his very nature is somewhat shy.*
- 4. The Helper does some interesting things. He especially convicts the world. He does this in three ways*
 - a. Regarding sin because they do not believe in Jesus*
 - b. Regarding righteousness because Jesus goes to the Father*
 - c. Regarding judgment because the ruler of this world is judged*

If you are finding these last three things less than clear, don’t feel too badly, lots of people have read this and scratched their heads a little. Here’s my stab at this, but don’t think that this is the only way to run with this. Sin is only a problem for the sinner who does not believe in Jesus. For the person who believes, there is no sentence passed, sentence for my sin was passed a long time ago on a hill outside of Jerusalem. With regard to righteousness, which is really the opposite of sin, I have sin, I need righteousness, Jesus, who has paid for sin, has triumphed and ascended to the very highest place. United to Jesus, I am at the very center of God’s righteous kingdom. Regarding Judgment, this is a little tougher. Does he mean the judgment of a court room? In other words, is the world being judged along with the one who brought it into rebellion? Or is this that the world has exercised bad judgment? I prefer the first one.

5. *The final piece one takes away from Jesus description of the Holy Spirit here is that he is shy. He glorifies Jesus, not himself. He tells what he has been told, not what he makes up. He is a conduit, not an original source of salvation or message, but a conduit of that salvation and message. He is here, but he does not draw any attention away from Christ.*

That is not to say that the Spirit is not God or that he is not creative or original. That simply doesn't make sense, but I do think this says something about the role that the Spirit plays in our life, as we interact with Him. He is here to glorify Christ, not himself. If your proclamation is about the Spirit, it might be missing the Spirit's point. He is here to testify to Jesus, he wants us to proclaim Jesus too. When we proclaim Jesus we are really being Spiritual. When we proclaim the Spirit without Jesus, we are being most unspiritual. If we worship the Spirit without the Son, we have missed it. The Spirit is poured out to bring us the Son who exegetes the Father. They are always a piece and God's love is always expressed through the hands of Christ.

Sermon Idea Inspired! (That the Holy Spirit would encourage and cheer the hearer with His presence and gifts.)

Jesus promises us the Helper/Paraclete – this sermon will assume that promise has been fulfilled in the hearer, through baptism, through being here today, through the presence of Christ in his community of faith, through the sacrament of the altar, and through the reading/hearing of the Word. Jesus has kept this promise. The Helper has been given. We are not helpless, we are help-filled, helpful.

Jesus immediately leaps into the place most Christians today dread – the bearing of witness. We are terrified of this. But this fear is largely borne out of a misapprehension. Our world has said that this talk about God and religion is gauche and inappropriate. One does not talk about religion in polite company and I am inclined to agree. Let's stop talking about religion, let's start talking Jesus. Let's stop trying to making Lutherans or even Christians out of people. That is not our job; that is God the Holy Spirit's job. Let's start doing our job and being a witness to Christ.

Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit walks along with us in that. The word Paraclete might be useful. It is almost untranslatable, and it means simply called beside, the helper is a good approximation, but it is only that. The Spirit of God works in and through us. The book of Acts tells us that the people who gathered with Peter after the Ascension and before the outpouring of the Pentecost those many years ago numbered about 120 folks. Within a few decades local governors were starting to take notice. By the end of the century the Emperor Domitian started to persecute this nascent movement. By the 300's it is estimated that nearly fifty percent of the Roman Empire were Christians. We don't know the exact number. Census data doesn't record it. But it was a lot of folks, enough that it was politically expedient for Constantine to declare that he was part of this movement.

How did that happen? It wasn't because Peter, James, and John subscribed to the latest evangelism techniques and manipulated folks into the kingdom. It was because they bore witness

with sometimes halting words. But the Spirit, the same Spirit poured out in our baptism, was walking with them, working beside them and through them.

Jesus is honest with us here. This will not always go swimmingly according to the standards of the world. We will look occasionally like failures. Every one of the apostles except for John were seized by the enemies of God's kingdom and martyred. They looked like losers that day, but the Holy Spirit was with them that day too. The world could work no loss which blunted that witness. Indeed, the very shame and death which the world worked in martyring these men and women would become the instrument of witness. The word martyr means witness.

Jesus has kept his promise and poured this Helper/Paraclete out on us. He assumed his throne in heaven for just such a purpose, that he might fill you and your life, and through that Spirit accompany you.